

# Declassified Israeli cables add evidence USS Liberty no accident

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A Special Report by the Chicago Tribune details declassified cables, from the Israeli State Archive, which add further evidence that Israel knew it was attacking an American ship as it attacked the USS Liberty.

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Last month, a new documentary [broadcast a tape for the first time](#), of Israeli military transmissions during the attack, which established that the ship was confirmed to be U.S. by 2:14pm that day, local time. The [timeline of the attack](#) establishes that the attack continued for another hour after that time.

The existence of the tape is confirmed by transcripts published in the Jerusalem Post in 2004.

USS Liberty

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The cables obtained by the Tribune, and translated from Hebrew to English, are were published in a 2007 special report. They detail exchanges between the Israeli ambassador in Washington and the Israeli foreign minister in Tel Aviv. Five days after the attack, Israeli Ambassador Avraham Harman worried that the deliberate nature of the attack had been uncovered, and cabled Foreign Minister Abba Eban that a source, code-named "Hamlet," had told him that the Americans had:



""clear proof that from a certain stage the pilot discovered the identity of the ship and continued the attack anyway.""

As the diplomatic uproar over the attack played out, Harman cabled three days later that:

""the Americans probably have findings showing that our pilots indeed knew that the ship was American.""

One of the sources of the information passed on by the Israeli ambassador was the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Arthur Goldberg, according to Israeli historian Tom Segev.

The 1967 attack, which the Israeli government said was an accident, has been festering, with [survivors](#) once again unanimously [renewing their call](#) for a congressional investigation. The survivors say the attack is the only incident involving major damage to an American ship and great loss of life which has never been accorded such an investigation.

Instead, the investigation was relegated to a U.S. Navy Court of Inquiry, presided over by Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., father of John McCain, the US senator and former presidential candidate. In 2003 the lead counsel for the Court, Captain Ward Boston, [stepped forward](#) to say that the Court had been ordered by President Lyndon B. Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to conclude that the attack had been a case of mistaken identity, "despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary." Captain Boston resigned from the Court before the inquiry was complete. He passed away in 2008.

Thirty four US servicemen were killed in the attack, and hundreds wounded. In the new documentary "[The Day Israel Attacked America](#)," survivors of the attack go on-camera to again recount their memories, and to reiterate their firm conviction, in which they have been joined by a [long list of top military and political figures](#), that the attack was a deliberate attempt to sink an American ship.

Supporters include former NSA Director Bobby Ray Inman and the late US Secretary of State, under Lyndon Johnson, Dean Rusk. Supporters of the survivors, such as the late [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas Moorer](#), say the reason for the attack may have been to blame the sinking of the ship on Egypt, with which Israel was at war at the time. This would have drawn the US into the Six Day War on the Israeli side.

USS Liberty, torpedo hole, starboard side.

<http://www.gtr5.com/>

There is little doubt, given the damage and the prolonged nature of the attack, that the Israeli military struggled to sink the ship. Over the course of the hour-and-a-half attack, numerous Israeli jet fighters and high-speed torpedo boats expended over 800 rounds of 30mm cannon, air-to-surface rockets, heat-seeking missiles, napalm bombs, and five torpedoes.



Toward the end of the attack, Israeli torpedo boats pulled up at close range and [machine-gunned the life-boats](#) that were being lowered into the water by the Liberty crew in preparation to abandon ship, beginning with the most severely wounded.

According to Geneva Article 12, the rules of war prohibit firing upon the wounded, or those attempting to evacuate them, at any time. Such action is considered an international war crime.

The new documentary, produced and directed by award-winning British film maker [Richard Belfield](#), is riveting in the details recounted by the survivors of the Liberty, such as the clear memory of blood streaming down the hull of the ship, reddening the water. On decks slippery with blood and littered with body parts, the crew fought fires and ship damage in order to keep the Liberty afloat, and tended to wounded, all while many were wounded themselves. Numerous commendations for heroism were awarded to crew members by the Navy, including a Medal of Honor, and then the crew's members ordered never to talk about the attack.

Supporting the thesis that the action was intended to be blamed on Egypt, and that President Lyndon B. Johnson may have had foreknowledge of it, is the coincidence that the US Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean was conducting a drill in which warplanes were already equipped with live nuclear weapons. In addition, Admiral of the Fleet Lawrence Geis told another officer on that day that LBJ had recalled two groups of US planes he had sent from his ships to assist the Liberty. [Geis told Lieutenant Commander David Lewis](#), the NSA commander on the Liberty, that in a frantic exchange with Secretary McNamara during the attack, Johnson:

""came on (the telephone) with a comment that he didn't care if the (Liberty) sunk, he would not embarrass his allies.""

Geis swore Lieutenant Commander Lewis to secrecy while he, Geis, was alive. Lewis honored the request and did not speak until Geis passed in 1980.

Students of the USS Liberty attack who claim it was a "false flag" operation, in which an attack is intended to be blamed on an enemy in order to accomplish a wartime objective, point out the "[Lavon Affair](#)" in which Israel was found to have planted bombs inside the American and British Embassies, in 1954, in order to blame the Muslim Brotherhood and to keep British troops in Egypt. That incident resulted in the resignation of an Israeli Defense Minister.

Although the Navy Court of Inquiry officially accepted the Israeli explanation that the attack was an accident, two other major government reports leave the question of Israeli culpability open, or have been backpedaled on by key figures. An [NSA report on the attack from 1981](#) calls the issue of whether Israel knew the ship was American an "unanswered question," saying:

"A persistent question relating to the Liberty incident is whether or not the Israeli forces which attacked the ship knew that it was American."



And although a CIA report issued soon after the attack officially concluded that it was a case of misidentification, the CIA Director at the time, Richard Helms, [in his memoirs later referred](#) to the Navy Court's original finding, before LBJ ordered that conclusion reversed. Helms wrote:

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"I had no role in the board of inquiry that followed, or the board's finding that there could be no doubt that the Israeli's knew exactly what they were doing in attacking the Liberty. I have yet to understand why it was felt necessary to attack this ship or who ordered the attack."

Other revelations in the Chicago Tribune report include statements by US intelligence officers who were following Israeli radio transmissions as the attack unfolded, who say there were numerous and repeated references to the ship being American, including pilots protesting the attack. Air Force Capt. Richard Block, who was commanding an intelligence wing of more than 100 analysts and cryptologists monitoring Middle Eastern communications on the island of Crete, told the [Tribune](#):

"The pilots said, 'This is an American ship. Do you still want us to attack?' And ground control came back and said, 'Yes, follow orders.'"

And Steve Forslundan, an intelligence analyst for the 544th Air Reconnaissance Technical Wing at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha, said that the Israeli military:

"made specific reference to the efforts to direct the jets to the target which was identified as American numerous times by the ground controller. Upon arrival, the aircraft specifically identified the target and mentioned the American flag she was flying. There were frequent operational transmissions from the pilots to the ground base describing the strafing runs. The ground control began asking about the status of the target and whether it was sinking. They stressed that the target must be sunk and leave no trace."

In 1993 James Ennes Jr., who was a lieutenant on the bridge of the Liberty on the day of the attack, said in an article for the [Washington Report for Middle East Affairs](#), that an Israeli pilot had approached the survivors and told them of his role in the attack. The pilot said he was told to ignore the American flag and continue his attack. He refused to do so and returned to base, where he was arrested upon landing. And in 1991 US Ambassador to Lebanon offered to repeat to congress and investigating authorities what he had [told Washington Post reporters Evans and Novak](#), that he had seen transcript of radio transmissions verifying that the Israelis knew the ship was American, and ordered pilots to continue the attack. No congressman's office or any other U.S. government official ever contacted Porter.

The Liberty survivors are circulating a petition, [hosted at MoveOn.org](#), demanding a congressional investigation of the Liberty be convened. The documentary film "The Day Israel Attacked America" is being broadcast by Al Jazeera America. Previous documentaries such as the BBC's "[Dead in the Water](#)" have found difficulty finding American broadcasters.

USS Liberty survivors still hold a commemoration event in Washington DC every year, to which, every year, US Congressmen and Defense Department officials are invited to attend. To date, not a single

congressman or DoD official has attended. The survivors have pledged to try to continue to have the ceremony each year for as long as any of them remain alive.

RELATED: "[Jerusalem Post confirms Israel knew USS Liberty was American](#)"

*The Day Israel Attacked America* [[mp4](#) at USS Liberty survivors' website.]

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